




City of Santa Barbara
Fire Department

Memorandum

DATE: 2/19/17

TO: Danny Kato, Senior Planner II

FROM: Joe Poiré, Fire Marshal 

SUBJECT: Setbacks and Fire Department Access

This memo is intended to answer questions raised about Fire Department requirements for residential building setbacks. A setback, as used here, is generally regarded to mean the distance from a structure to neighboring property lines, other structures, creeks or other physical elements where separation is desired. Reference to fire related setbacks are sometimes found in local zoning ordinances or statutes such as Government Code 65852.2 et seq. where the code lists acceptable conditions for the location of an Accessory Dwelling Unit to include "side and rear setbacks" that are sufficient for fire safety.

When considering new development, the Fire Department has not adopted a setback rule to accomplish our access requirements. Access requirements, pursuant the California Fire Code as adopted under Municipal Code 8.04, consist of an all-weather driving surface to within 150 feet of all exterior walls. Access may be met in any number of ways, with or without a setback.

The Fire Code does regulate the placement and storage of hazardous materials, flammable and combustible liquids and gasses and explosives on a property, and some of those regulations include distance to property line requirements, but those do not apply to residential structures and often the solution is simply to move the materials to another location on the property.

Construction requirements relating to distance to property lines are regulated by the California Building Code and vary depending on the area, occupancy hazard and construction type. The Fire Department defers to the Building Official for those requirements.

In short, there is no setback requirement for Fire Department purposes provided that our access requirement is met.